

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVII—No. 1

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

ABOUT THE END of the second century an otherwise unknown Christian writer, Minucius Felix, wrote a pamphlet in defence of Christianity called *The Octavian*. The pamphlet was itself neither more nor less remarkable than many other apologies for Christianity that have appeared since; it would hardly convince anyone not already on the point of conviction. Apologies for religion probably represent doubtful assets, raising more doubts than they set at rest. This was perhaps the thought behind the notable observation made by that pious Christian George III to Bishop Watson, author of a reply to Paine: "Dear me, Bishop! I had no idea the Bible needed apologising for."

The Octavian does contain one sinister phrase, which occurs in the course of the dispute carried on by the Christian and Pagan protagonists in the picturesque setting of an Italian seashore. The Christian makes this observation: "With you, only actual crimes are punished but with us opinions are equally criminal." With that saying a monstrous dark shadow fell across the bright skies of the classical world. Religious intolerance had entered Europe! The future lay with the new arrival, for at the time when Minucius Felix wrote his apology for the new oriental religion, the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, as Gibbon was later to term it, was just beginning. In the political sphere this took the form of the Barbarian invasion of the empire. In the intellectual sphere the simultaneous inroads of the oriental religions were steadily undermining the rationalistic basis of the classical culture. In the century after *The Octavian* was written the great rationalist schools of philosophy, the Stoics and Epicureans, vanished into the growing darkness. Only a few years earlier the anti-Christian polemic of Celsus, *The True Word*, to which Minucius Felix may actually have been replying, had foreseen with obvious fear the proximate triumph of the Christian cult. In the words of another pagan writer, "a formless darkness was descending upon the earth." The lights of classical Humanism were going out one by one.

A New and Inexpiable Crime

Christianity was initially established by Constantine but its position was still precarious and the pagan reactions under Julian the Apostate and Eugenius kept the issue in doubt till the last years of the fourth century, when the Spanish bigot Theodosius (378-95) set to work to exterminate systematically all the religious rivals of Catholic Christianity. He deserves the title of "the first Christian Emperor" more so than the opportunist Constantine. Ferocious laws were applied against both heretics and pagans. However, the "honour" of actually introducing the death penalty for opinion was reserved for his rival the Emperor Maximus, who had the Spanish heretic Priscillian burnt alive in 385, a red letter day in the annals of Europe! The significance of the event was not lost upon his contemporaries; many

classically trained Christians denounced what one of their number prophetically described as "a new and inexpiable crime" (my italics).

"Compel them to come in"

Despite the protests of more liberal Churchmen, religious persecution had come to stay. In the fifth century Pope Leo introduced it into Rome, giving the Papal sanction to the "smelling out" and subsequent execution of Manicheans and other heretics. The Pope based his persecuting activity on the ominous interpretation of the Gospel axiom by Augustine, "Compel them to come in." This was to remain a stumbling block in the path

of toleration for the next 12 centuries. In obedience to this precept Charlemagne gave the pagan Saxons the alternative of baptism or the sword, while the Crusaders similarly justified their itinerant massacres of Jews.

Down to the 13th century, however, persecution remained sporadic and local. But that century, and in particular the year 1233, when Pope Gregory IX officially endorsed the Roman Inquisition, marks a new era in the annals of religious persecution. The famous institution and its still more dreaded Spanish offspring (founded, or rather re-founded, by Torquemada at the end of the 15th century) was a new type of institution, a kind of Roman "thought police," the sole function of which was the forcible "liquidation" of heresy. Historical analogies are apt to be loose, but that between the Inquisition and the modern German Gestapo is most impressively accurate. Both were specialised engines of repression necessitated by contemporary crises in Church and State. From its initial bloody repression of the Albigenses down to its final *autos da fe* in Spain and Portugal the current practice of the Inquisition made orthodoxy synonymous with persecution. Europe had arrived at the opinion of Minucius Felix, that opinion as such is as criminal as action.

Persecution in 20th century Rome

The Spanish Inquisition was finally suppressed by Napoleon in 1808, while the Roman variety lost its punitive recourse to "the secular arm" when the Papal States were abolished in 1870. Since then the death penalty has never been formally inflicted upon heretics, despite *de facto* persecutions in some Catholic states. But theologians are notoriously of conservative breed, and the death penalty for heresy has retained influential advocates in the present century. The famous French theologian Cardinal Lepicier, saluted by the then Pope as one of the brightest ornaments of the Faith, formally advocated it in his book against Modernism, on "Continuity and Change in Catholic Dogma." So also did the Jesuit professor De Luca of the Papal (Gregorian) University. But more worldly-minded Catholics such as Mgr. Knox have admitted that *as things stand at present* it would be impossible to enforce it.

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Rome and Toleration

By F. A. RIDLEY

Modern Concordats

The latter view appears now to be accepted by Rome in its current dealings with even totally Catholic states like Spain and Portugal. It has found quasi-official endorsement in recent years, particularly in the most favourable of such documents to the R.C. Church, the Concordat of 1954 between the Vatican and Franco. The terms of this Concordat will probably be the model followed by all such negotiated agreements. It does not mention the death penalty and even explicitly recognises the duty of the Catholic state to tolerate minority religious opinions. But *in practice* the Concordat severely limits such toleration. The R.C. Church is officially recognised as the state religion; all propaganda against it is illegal and subject to the criminal law, while even heretical Churches are forbidden either to make any public display of their rites or even to advertise their existence and public services. This would appear to make freethought illegal, since its propaganda is illegal, while Protestant Churches are reduced to a hole-and-

corner existence on the fringe of legality without any chance of increasing their membership from without by means of propaganda. Such is the official policy of Rome on toleration today!

"Until the times do alter"

At present the death penalty for heresy is in abeyance, but for how long? It is difficult to see how so dogmatic a creed as that of "The One True Faith" can ever retreat from this exclusive position. Heresy must continue to be regarded as a major crime, and the argument must hold that it is better to burn here temporarily than in the next world permanently. If Rome were to recover her power would she again kill heretics? Possibly not while the current mental climate remained, but how long would such a climate — ultimately due to rationalist thought — continue under the ægis of the Catholic Church? Rome, probably, has only relaxed her persecuting hold "until the times do alter" — in her favour!

Prayer: Activity of the Deluded

By F. G. MACFARLANE

IN THE NOVEMBER ISSUE of the *Reader's Digest* there is one of the regular incitements to prayer which have become a more marked feature of that journal in recent times. On this occasion it is by a minister of religion who calls himself "Rev. Robert McCracken."

I think this particular contribution is interesting because it is so barefaced in its support for nationalism — and I suspect that this is really why it has been chosen for inclusion among the contributions selected for publication.

The following extract from the peroration sets the standard for the whole article, and a study of it will indicate the careful orthodoxy of the writer — an orthodoxy which in this case has paid cash dividends in the shape of fees from the publishers! Mr. McCracken writes:

"If we have imagination, if we care enough, if we love people and causes enough — our children, our church, our country — we instinctively turn to God on their behalf, and seek the reinforcing of our love by His. Prayer is love raised to its greatest power; and the prayer of intercession is the noblest and most Christian kind of prayer because in it love — and imagination — reach their highest and widest range."

In the same strain we find this passage earlier in the article:

"If a man prays for his friends, for those dear to him, he is certain to be concerned about them and active in his concern. If habitually and fervently he prays for his country, he will be a conscientious and loyal citizen, making a worthwhile contribution to the life of his time."

Will he? Is this advice — given so liberally to thousands or perhaps millions of readers — really sound in the light of the current events in the world, which obviously spring from nationalism of various kinds? Is it logically practicable that, in this atomic age, when weapons like the hydrogen bomb have been placed in the hands of the leaders of groups which are carefully trained to put the interests of a part of the world first in their lives, we should thus teach men to *keep on* putting the interests of a country in the forefront of our concern?

Of course it isn't. This is simply a madness of the mind brought on by the stultification of intelligence due to the persistent activity of publishers in directing men's minds to old ideas and the superstitions of a bygone age.

Instead of clear thinking, based on scientific principles — which is what we should be getting on the radio and in the daily press — we get this perpetual harping upon belief in an animistic God who intervenes in our affairs and is

leading us along correct paths. What nonsense it all is. And how dangerous are the delusions fostered by men like McCracken and those who choose the rubbish he writes for publication.

This situation is a challenge to all of us whose minds have been awakened to the realities of the world situation. I think we who have seen the dangers surrounding the persistence of the teaching of a praying attitude to life — in our schools and all public ceremonies — must see that apparent acquiescence in these things merely results in their continuance. In other words, we must fight against the domination of the education of our children and the rest of the means of public information and propaganda by those who are deluded by the idea that prayer can put the world to rights. I call for action by all who have children at school to ensure that provision is made for their being excused participation in morning prayers, grace at dinners, religious services in schools, lectures by religious missionaries, and all the other ways in which religious ideas are brought into school life. I would demand that all chaplains be refused permission to enter any school in an official capacity — i.e. for teaching classes (as a minister) or saying prayers or giving readings from the Bible at ceremonial affairs. Every activity of this kind which goes unopposed is helping to maintain the delusions of the prayerful and thus influence the people of the next generation along wrong paths by giving them wrong ideas.

Nobody can be taught to face the truth too early in his life and I would ask those who are tempted to regard religion in school as something innocuous and ineffective — something which is necessary to a child on the recapitulation theory — to dismiss this from their minds immediately and to realise that they are watching the deformation of the minds of the next generation. Prayer and the continual urging of prayer as an intelligent approach to our problems is really a dangerous activity which is spreading delusion and maintaining it on the minds of people who should be having their minds cleared for intelligent personal action in terms of social and universal reality.

The next generation must learn that the world is our country, that all men are our neighbours, and that to achieve world civilisation it is urgently necessary to face all our problems in the light of these ideas and not of those of men like McCracken.

The Religion of Charles Dickens

By C. G. L. DU CANN

PERSONAL RELIGIONS, as distinct from orthodoxies, are always interesting. They afford an insight into personality, for each of us believes what he wishes to believe, which in turn, is what his nature as modified by his nurture, drives him to believe. We tie labels on ourselves, such as Christian or Buddhist or the like; but such labels are often misleading or lying. Never is the Gospel according to Matthew Jones the same as the Gospel according to Mark Brown, Luke Robinson, or John Smith.

Like Saint Paul altering Jesus to suit his own temperament, we modify our religion into a comfortable shape to fit, like new boots or shoes, as we walk along. For Western peoples must wear their Christianity with a difference; pure and undiluted, it is far too Eastern and impractical for their comfort, in such follies as loving our enemies, such as Russia, and taking no thought for the morrow, such as failing to exact oppressive rates and taxes, or manufacturing hydrogen-bombs.

Certainly Charles Dickens made his religion to suit his own temperament. He leaned towards Unitarianism, with some sentimental bias in favour of very Low Church Anglicism. He detested dogma, especially of the kind he called the "camel-swallowing and gnat-straining sort." He distrusted and despised both Roman Catholicism and Dissent in most of their manifestations. On the whole, his was a Jesus-religion, stripped of accretions. He based it upon the New Testament, "in its broad spirit and putting no faith in any man's narrow construction of its letter here or there," to quote the last words of his last Will and Testament — that much-criticised composition which one critic has called the worst of Dickens's works.

But though he had a pew in St. John's Church at Higham, near Gad's Hill — a very proper thing for the local Squire — Dickens really was no good Churchman. In orthodox Church language, he was no better than a heretic and schismatic, destined to damnation under the terms of the creed of Saint Athanasius as recorded in the English prayer-book, for the edification of those who can find edification in it, who must be few in these days. Incidentally, he was a violent anti-Sabbatarian; the pamphlet he wrote as a very young man called "Sunday Under Three Heads" by Timothy Sparkes made sparks fly and represented his views all the days of his life.

Readers of the biographies of Dickens from the falsifying John Forster down to the latest exhausting Professor Edgar Johnson (with the in-betweens such as Pope-Hennessy, Kitton, Hesketh Pearson, Strauss, and Thomas Wright, to name a few of the better-known amongst the multitude) will realise that Dickens kept his religion in a strictly subordinate place. Like most people, he went to Church mostly for weddings, christenings and funerals. But on expelling each son from England in youth, he gave each a New Testament together with a little literary sermon composed for the occasion by himself. Also, he kept a family Bible for family-entries (which is still extant at the Dickens House in Doughty Street in a glass case). All this is of little significance. What is significant is that in action, over and over again public and in private, he played the part of the Good Samaritan, with his money, his time and his work.

In himself, Charles Dickens was, of course, an unquestionable genius, a very extraordinary manifestation of the life-force, fantastically energetic, relentlessly active not only in his vast literary output, but in every other work or play that he undertook. Yet as a religious thinker, he was

infantile. On the subject of his own religious belief, that restless, searching critical mind was passive and acquiescent — probably because an easy acceptance of the Father-God and Christ the Good Man was suited to his naturally kindly temperament, as a higher incarnation of itself.

Writing incessantly as he did for dear money, inevitably Charles Dickens, despite his genius, often wrote abominably, even when he wrote for love. For example: his *Life of Christ* is a dreadful production, unworthy of him, and quite as poor as his *Life of Grimaldi the Clown*, or his ghastly *Child's History of England*. This Christ-life was not intended by him for publication; it was to be expressly private for his own children. Indeed, it was not worth printing this poor paraphrase of what had been so much better told by King James's divines. (All the same it was sold for publication after his death.) It is curious to note that although he wrote this piece from the highest motives, as he wrote the Grimaldi from the lowest, both were about equally bad as literature.

Of course, "God" was a stock character in Dickensian fictions, whether those fictions were bibliographical or merely epistolatory. God is generally introduced to give emphasis or solemnity to the context — a quite justifiable rhetorical device on the part of an author or orator to impress an audience, most of whom are susceptible to it. No doubt in doing this, Dickens was quite as much tuning-in to the prevalent Victorian atmosphere as expressing his own personal emotion at the time.

In his expression of religion, he was entirely conventional. As he put it: "I have always striven in my writings to express veneration for the life and lessons of Our Saviour." The use of the word "striven" here is unfortunate, as it implies effort and difficulty, which is not perhaps quite what Dickens meant to convey. But some of Dickens' writing is very slipshod, done as it was, at speed.

Like most men, Charles Dickens was both bad and good. Certainly he was not the saint most of his contemporaries thought him. Perhaps his beloved young daughter, Kate Perugini, summed him up most honestly when she said: "My father was a wicked man — but he was wonderful" in talking of his youthful mistress, "the small, fair-haired, rather pretty actress Ellen Ternan," and their "resultant son," adding that "My poor mother was afraid of my father . . . he did not care a damn what happened to any of us. Nothing could surpass the misery and unhappiness of our home." Clearly, his religion did not prevent the seduction of the "meritorious young actress" by this highly-masculine man — but we must not ask impossibilities of any man's religion.

For the truth is that religion did not make Dickens other than he was: a hag-ridden man, driven irresistibly through life to breakdown and premature death, by the overworking demon of his talent, and by the hordes of relative-parasites battenning upon his success like lice. His religion did not make a better man, nor a happier man. Nor could it console him for such misfortunes as the death of Mary Hogarth when "God in His mercy, numbered her with his Angels at the early age of seventeen" — a mercy from which Dickens never recovered for the rest of his days.

One cannot escape the conclusion that Charles Dickens would have been as much Charles Dickens without his religion as with it. The inordinate passion and remarkable facility for self-expression, and for distilling letters out of life, the unusual ability to impress an audience of viewers

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

It is obvious that the attacks on the Bible by Freethinkers have been so successful that it was being more and more discredited; and the Churches were at their wits' end to bring it back as the source of England's greatness, so the German Dr. Keller is a Godsend for the Churches, not only in stopping the rot, but in boosting up the circulations of a number of provincial newspapers—as the Editor of the Leicester *Evening Mail* knows well. And when he writes that Dr. Keller's book should be read by "the agnostic and rationalist," he must be writing with his tongue in his cheek. Any of us could make mincemeat of the book.

★

One of the questions asked at the BBC'S "Christian Forum" recently was "Why, if Christianity was meant to be the Universal Religion, were the Jews made God's Chosen People?" This simple question completely befogged the Christian experts—who were, by the way, Mrs. Stocks, Canon Heaton, and Father Huddleston. The Canon despairingly answered "God knows!" Mrs. Stocks hadn't a clue, while Father Huddleston embarked on one of those wordy theological explanations which could mean anything or nothing, whichever you chose, but which was quite irrelevant.

★

The plain truth is—there is no answer. The utter absurdity of God choosing some people out of all the world who later obstinately refused to change their religion in spite of the most savage Christian persecution, must be apparent to all. But there is one point which ought not to be forgotten. It is that it is the Jews themselves who claim that they were chosen by God, backed up by Christians. But is it true? What is the evidence? To swallow such a silly tale shows how religion can perpetuate the most incredible credulity.

★

A German judge recently heavily fined two publishers for producing a book called *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* which, following the true and canonical Holy Writ, dealt with witchcraft, and showed how it was possible, among other similar ceremonies, to call up the Devil from the mighty deep by sacrificing a deer. In actual fact, three men faithfully followed the detailed instruction, hoping to swindle His Infernal Highness out of some money; but a previous appointment kept the Devil away.

★

But the really interesting point is that the judge actually called the book "a conglomeration of nonsensical witchcraft"—as if that were possible in the face of the express injunction in God's Precious Word to kill all witches. If the Lord admits the existence of witches—and he does—who are we to question him? Or even a German judge? Although the court ordered the destruction of all copies of the book, no fewer than 9,000 had been sold at 16s. 6d. each. There's money in the Devil as well as in Jesus.

★

Our popular contemporary "The People" is printing reports on "the Life Beyond" through famous mediums, and the point which intrigues us is the perfect ease with which contact is at once arranged between the medium and the spook. For example, we have Mrs. Estelle Roberts meeting a perfect stranger and telling him all about his dead wife—though he "regarded Spiritualism with an ill-defined scepticism." A few words, and she was in immediate contact—"it was as quick, as dramatic as that."

★

Many of us, like ourselves, have in vain asked for information from the Life Beyond; but all we got was that there

was an adverse influence in the hall that night. We have implored a planchette to tell us where some of our lost valuable property had gone to. We have sat with light tables which *always* moved round the room, except when we were there, at the touch of a medium's hand; and we have always been told that spirits never, never, come up when asked for. Perhaps the large fee given by *The People* does the trick—though for the life of us we don't know how a spirit spends any money in the Life Beyond.

75 Years Ago

[From THE FREETHINKER of January 15th, 1882.]

THE FREETHINKER is causing a great commotion in religious circles and it is frequently said that we should be prosecuted and suppressed. . . . What is our offence? Blasphemy. And what is that? Treating religion with common sense. Piety never recognised a greater crime. It is like the sin against the Holy Ghost and can never be forgiven.

But, it is urged, we do not content ourselves with arguing against Christianity; we ridicule it. While Freethought is serious and a trifle dull, Christians can tolerate it, but the moment it assumes an ironical air they are as alarmed as Macbeth was by Banquo's ghost, and cry, "Take any shape but that."

Unsatisfied with the charge of blasphemy against THE FREETHINKER, our opponents now trump up another charge of indecency; just as the Bishop of Manchester, finding that he cannot reach secularism out of his diocese, seeks to injure it by slandering its character. He says that secularism teaches men and women to "live tally," and our enemies say THE FREETHINKER is lewd.

Some weeks ago Paine's *Age of Reason* was seized at the Toronto Custom House as an obscene work, and after a good deal of controversy it transpired that every objectionable passage in that famous book was a quotation from the Bible. Our guilt is precisely similar. We are occasionally obliged to defile our pages with an extract from God's Word, but it is surely an extenuation of our offence that when the sacred text is too filthy to cite we rest satisfied with an allusion.

THE RELIGION OF DICKENS

(Concluded from page 3)

or readers with unforgettable impressions that made him the great writer, the great orator, the great actor that he was—that was his real religion, rather than the variant of Christianity that he habitually professed. He knew it, too, well enough. For it was by that and for that he lived, rejoiced and sorrowed; and through it he shortened his life and came to sudden death at only fifty-eight.

Writing and speaking was his real religion. None who reads his life and letters can doubt that. When he died the philanthropic Lord Shaftesbury declared that God gave Dickens a general retainer against all suffering and oppression. But that is only putting him on the level of the rest of us who all have that general retainer, surely, however little we carry it out. That was not the whole of Dickens' religion; far from it, as I have shown.

He professed one conventional religion; he practised another of his own. However, there is nothing novel in that. It is probably the case with almost all of us, even those of us who profess and call ourselves irreligionists, who, very likely, in our hearts, worship some private god of our own whom we do not acknowledge even in the secrecy of ourselves.

THE FREETHINKER

41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.
Telephone: Holborn 2601.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s. (in U.S.A., \$4.25); half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda.

R. RHODES.—When Catholics talk about disestablishing the Church, they mean a Church, i.e. the Protestant Church. They would love to take its place.

D.W.—By Christianity we mean what history knows as Christianity, not some definition it now pleases anyone to dream up.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH, CORSAIR and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.15 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, and SMITH.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings most evenings of the week (often afternoons): Messrs. THOMPSON, SALISBURY, HOGAN, PARRY, HENRY and others.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTIUR and EBURY.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, January 6th, 6.45 p.m., F. A. RIDLEY, "The Great Religious Orders."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 8th, 7.15 p.m.: Social Evening. A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "My Visit to Russia," and W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "My Visit to Mexico."

Dagenham Branch N.S.S. (Woodward Hall, Woodward Road).—Sunday, January 6th, 7 p.m.: "The Case for Secularism." Speakers: C. McCALL, "Secularism v. Religion"; L. EBURY, "Morality and Bible"; P. V. MORRIS, "Propaganda on the Air."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, January 6th, 6.30 p.m.: PAT SLOAN, "The Soviet Challenge to the Christian World."

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Liverpool).—Sunday, January 6th, 7.15 p.m.: A. HENRY, "Irrational and Rational Beliefs."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, January 6th, 2.30 p.m.: T. LYNCH, "Shoplifting in Multiple Shops."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, January 6th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "Religious Belief in this Geo-Physical Year."

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, January 6th, 7.30 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

Notes and News

TO ALL OUR READERS, and to all Freethinkers everywhere, we extend our heartiest wishes for the New Year. We need hardly point out that "eternal vigilance" is still "the price of Liberty" — as current world events so sadly testify. But we shall, as always, keep both our flag and our courage high. And in this we know we have our readers solidly behind us.

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £147 4s. 8d.; S. Jones, 5s.; R. Stewart, 5s.; J. Buchanan, 10s.; Mr. Murphy, 2s. 6d.; E.C.R., 5s.; C. Jones, 5s.; A. McNair, 10s.; Mr. and Mrs. C. Little, £1; A. George, 5s.; T. C. Yelland, £3; Mrs. N. Rutherford, £1; A. Addison, £1; D. Dainow (South Africa), £1 3s. 6d.; S. Trent, 2s. 6d.; M. Baker (Malaya), 10s.; J.T., 5s.; R. Law, £1.—Total to date, December 28th, 1956, £158 13s. 2d.

THERE is just time to remind members of the West London Branch that the Annual General Meeting will be held at the Laurie Arms on Sunday at 7.30 p.m. This means that the Central London Branch will hold no meeting this week. They will, however, commence the second half of the season with a lecture on January 13th by Mr. G. H. Taylor on the World Freethought Press.

★

THE case for Secularism will be put for the first time at Dagenham on the public platform on Sunday, January 6th, this being a new venture on the part of the Dagenham Branch N.S.S. The meeting is at the Woodward Hall, Woodward Road. Doors open at 7 o'clock, and the meeting will be from 7.30 to 9.30, including questions and discussion. Mr. G. W. Warner, President of the Branch, will take the chair, and the speakers will be Mr. Colin McCall on "Secularism versus Religion," Mr. L. Ebury on "Morality and the Bible," and Mr. P. Victor Morris on "Propaganda on the Air." THE FREETHINKER and other literature will be on sale. The hall is easily accessible from Becontree Station and it is hoped that many from other towns will attend, as the success of this venture will mean that other efforts of this nature can be attempted.

★

BEGINNING today (January 4th) the Friday Study Circle at 41 Gray's Inn Road (7.15 p.m.) will be addressed by Mr. F. A. Ridley on "The History of Christianity" in a course of six lectures. The subjects will be: (1) Christian Origins, (2) The Revolution of the 4th Century, (3) Roman Catholicism in the Middle Ages, (4) The Protestant Reformation, (5) Modern Christianity, (6) Christianity in Society. These will be on successive Fridays. The fee for each lecture is a shilling. Whether this scheme of winter courses can be repeated in future years depends largely on the support given to this experiment, and those in the area are cordially invited to attend.

★

WRITING from Liverpool, Mr. G. Dickinson tells us of plans to form an association of Esperantist Freethinkers in Britain. Present plans are to hold an inaugural meeting in London on 27/1/1957 (Sunday), when it is intended to discuss the establishment of the organisation, its statutes and officers, etc. Those interested should write to G. Dickinson, 21 Gribble Road, Liverpool, 10, Lancs.

★

ARRANGEMENTS are going ahead for the World Union of Freethinkers International Congress in Paris in 1957. The definite dates are not yet decided but it will be either the week-end September 1st or September 8th. President of the Congress is Bertrand Russell, O.M., and Vice-President, Sir R. P. Paranjpye (India). Principal subjects are: Population and Concordats.

—NEXT WEEK—

RATE RELIEF FOR THE CLERGY

By COLIN McCALL

An Atheist Petition

"Here is a picture of the atheist. His conduct is like that of a snarling, sneaking dog, after a night of prowling and howling, that slinks back to his kennel to sleep the time away. Such have no restraints on their conduct. . . . Since there is no God to hear, why be concerned about conversation or conduct. . . ."

IF THE ABOVE had been uttered by some religious maniac within the precincts of a mental asylum he could have been treated as an object of pity.

If it had been circulated in some obscure parish magazine, some public challenge to it could have been made and the writer exposed, but little harm would have been done.

This utterly contemptible sample of Christian cowardice was, however, broadcast over an American station in a radio sermon by the Rev. Ord Morrow of Lincoln, Nebraska, some months ago. It subsequently also reappeared in his printed booklet. The extent of its publicity requires that appropriate action should be taken.

After the broadcast and the booklet, a visitor called at the office of the Programme Director concerned and protested against the use of the station for the Rev. O. Morrow's scurrilous attack on the character of atheists. The Director admitted that the statement should not have been made and undertook to write to the Rev. O. Morrow on the matter.

The visitor was Robert H. Scott, a friend of THE FREETHINKER and occasional contributor, and the main party of the famous "Scott Decision" of 1946.

In response to a petition made by Mr. Scott on behalf of atheists, the Commission, in its Scott Decision, ruled that broadcasting station licensees must not refuse radio time for answers to direct attacks on atheism as a point of view, or on atheists individually or as a class. It also gave licensed broadcasters clearly to understand that they could not altogether exclude atheism from their microphones if they accepted religious programmes.

Here are some excerpts from the Scott Decision:

"Freedom of religious belief necessarily carries with it freedom to disbelieve, and freedom of speech means freedom to express disbeliefs as well as beliefs. If freedom of speech is to have meaning it cannot be predicated on the mere popularity or public acceptance of the ideas sought to be advanced. It must be extended as readily to ideas which we disapprove or abhor as to ideas which we approve."

"Moreover, freedom of speech can be as effectively denied by denying access to the public means of making expression effective—whether public streets, parks, meeting halls, or the radio—as by legal restraints or punishment of the speaker."

"It is dangerous that the unsound be permitted to flourish for want of criticism."

"An organisation or idea may be projected into the realm of controversy by virtue of being attacked. The holders of a belief should not be denied the right to answer attacks upon them or their beliefs solely because they are few in number."

Yet these explicit regulations are being regularly flouted by America's licensed broadcasters and telecasters. Religious programmes are accepted. Atheist replies are barred.

Protests have been made to the Commission by Mr. Scott on various occasions since 1946. Broadcasters have continued to defy the ruling of the Commission, and therefore of the Federal Government of the U.S.A.

Every religious broadcaster acquiesces in the Scott Decision by implication. He is aware that the regulations lay him open to answer from atheists. He broadcasts on that condition, according to the official Decision. By the very fact of his broadcasting he accepts the legality of a subsequent atheist reply.

What, therefore, should he do in the face of the repeated ban on atheist broadcasts. If he is a Christian pretending to believe in the "Golden Rule" of doing unto others; if he professes to believe in honesty and fair play; if he maintains it is right to keep promises; then it is his bounden moral duty to join Mr. Scott and other atheists in their protests against the violation of the Scott Decision.

By his broadcasting he accepts the idea of fair play. By his subsequent silence he repudiates it. His words may claim fair play for all. His actions proclaim that he intends it only for himself.

On November 17, 1946, three months after the rendering of the Scott Decision, the manager of Radio Station KQW of San Francisco, afraid that the broadcasting license of that station, a commercial corporation which accepted religious programmes, would be revoked or not renewed by the Commission if he continued to refuse radio time for atheism, made thirty minutes of radio time available to Mr. Scott for an atheistic broadcast. As was stated by *Newsweek* magazine in its issue of December 2nd, 1946, in its comments on that broadcast: "Public responses favouring a continuation of atheistic programmes were far heavier than the station had anticipated." Because of those approving public responses the management of KQW was prepared to make additional radio time available for atheism in the form of public forums.

This, however, remained in the land of promise. Station KQW, which depended on its advertisers for its income, yielded to the coercive pressure, much of it threatening, of certain organised religious groups, principally Roman Catholic, and refused to sell or to give additional radio time for atheism even once a month or even once a year!

In that refusal of additional radio time for atheism KQW was joined by other broadcasting stations. Defiant disregard of the regulatory dicta of the Scott Decision by dollar-minded broadcasting corporations has continued ever since 1946, even though these stations regularly and frequently sell or give free radio and television time to such obscurantist religious propagandists as Evangelist Billy Graham and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, and to such intolerantly bigoted ignoramuses as the Rev. Ord Morrow.

The Commission is directly and principally responsible for this shameful state of affairs; for the Commission, also yielding to pressure by organised religion and its supporters in and out of Government, has deliberately failed to implement its Scott Decision. In March of 1947 Mr. Scott formally petitioned the Commission to revoke the broadcasting licence of Station KQW for its refusal to sell or give additional radio time for atheism. After an interval of two and a half years the petition met with a terse denial.

In 1948 Station WHAM of Rochester, New York, allowed an attack on atheists and atheism by a Roman Catholic priest, but then refused the right of atheist reply. General Counsel of the Commission at the time, attorney Benedict P. Cottone, declared that "WHAM's position is squarely in conflict with the Commission's decision in the Scott Case" and "therefore renewal of licence cannot be made at this time consistent with the Scott Opinion." (Quoted in Federal Government transcript of the testimony before the House Committee.)

It is therefore without any expectation of success that Robert Scott has once again petitioned to the F.C.C. at Washington for the non-renewal of the licence of the station which put out the Rev. O. Morrow's despicable tirade. But it will go on record that he made the petition

The Viking and the Vatican

[Translator's note: The following article, "Did the Vatican Suppress the News of the Original Discovery of America?" by Jean Coryne, appeared in the Bulletin of the *Cercle Ernest Renan*, an association of scholarly Freethinkers specially interested in problems connected with the origins and history of Christianity.—F.A.R.]

IT IS HISTORICALLY CERTAIN that the Viking Eric the Red and his followers settled in Greenland in the years 982 and after. The expedition of Leif, the eldest son of Eric the Red, to the western land named Vineland after its luscious vines, also appears to be proved by the Greenland Saga, though there is some doubt as to where he actually landed.

A literary source absolutely independent of the Sagas speaks of Vineland: It is *The Ecclesiastical History of Hamburg*, written in 1070 by the theologian, Adam of Bremen, who, in the fourth volume of his work, under the general title of "Description of the Northern Islands," describes Vineland and speaks of "the wild fruits there found in abundance the existence of which is reported by the Danes." In the "Icelandic Annals," under the heading 1121, we find the laconic report: "Bishop Eric Set Out for Vineland." At the International Catholic Congress at Brussels in 1895, a Catholic historian declared that his researches had established the fact that Eric Gruppson was nominated in 1102 by Pope Pascal II (1098-1118), Bishop of Greenland ("and of the neighbouring regions"). The seat of his Episcopal See was fixed at Gardar in Greenland. This is presumably the Bishop who "set out for Vineland" in 1121. We do not know what became of him. In any case, if we accept our information, it would only have been after his decision to stay permanently in Vineland that the Greenlanders would have requested at the meeting of the "Assembly of all Free Men" in 1121, the appointment of a new Bishop. It would thus appear that the Papacy was fully and diversely informed about the existence and whereabouts of Vineland. In any case, we know that both Icelanders and Greenlanders regularly frequented the capital of Christendom. The Vatican was probably kept in touch with all the available information about the lands in the Far West.

What, then, are we to make of the indisputable fact that the existence of the Viking colonies in these regions has been completely ignored and that the information which must have existed in the Vatican archives about these colonies has never been opened to scientific research? Did the Vatican think that the revelation of the existence of vast lands where lived an immense population amongst whom the teaching of Christ was unknown would have a demoralising effect upon the Faithful and perhaps distract them from the "Holy War" against the exclusively Mohammedan "Infidels"? Or did it reach the conclusion that these Scandinavian colonies must inevitably decay and ultimately die out, as did eventually happen? Or did it, possibly, think it inexpedient to depart from the belief that had existed since Ptolemy that beyond Northern Europe there existed only lands uninhabitable by man? Actually, the priest Armadr who met Esquimaux in Greenland in 1266, did not hesitate to describe these creatures with yellow skins, slit eyes, and greasy as of Satanic origin. And yet Pope Hadrian IV came to Norway between 1154 and 1159 at a time when the Norse colonies in Greenland were still extremely prosperous. At least two visits by Greenland Bishops to Rome are on record: one about 1200; the other in 1369. A papal Brief of Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) dated August 10th, 1492 (seven days after the initial start of Christopher Columbus) deploras the decline of Christianity in Greenland, and nominated the Benedictine monk Matthias as Bishop of Greenland, but the monk

and that it was turned down — as it certainly will be in the most conscienceless manner. American radio and TV will be left free for Christian propaganda and for attacks on atheists, and will be practically closed to atheist reply. Christians will continue to condone the breaking of promises — explicit official promises involving ultimately the good faith of the Federal Government itself. The malicious mouthings of Christian cowards of the bonehead type represented by the Rev. Ord Morrow, will continue. The atheist will be vilified because it is safe to do so. Christians will continue to lay claim to the highest moral principles, while in practice demanding the right to hog the public air for their own propaganda, protected in defiance of the published findings in the 1946 Decision. The atheist will continue to have the lowest moral principles imputed to him. And here is Robert Scott, atheist, making his dignified protest in the concluding words of his Petition:

"Even if the Commission should deny my petition, an act which would be one of craven or unprincipled self-interest, I should be on record as having filed this petition and the Commission would be on record as having denied it."

Let our comrades in the various sections of the freethought press of America make their voices heard over this Petition. And let its refusal be used for freethought propaganda as widely as those several voices can reach.

For our part, THE FREETHINKER salutes this brave fighter for elementary human rights and decencies. An extract from the Petition appeared last week.

G.H.T.

Review

[*Eleven-Plus and All That*, the Grammar School in a changing society, by Dr. Flann Campbell, pub. Watts, 15s. net.]

IN THE LAST HALF CENTURY there has been a noteworthy change in the structure of society, a change which is still operative. The Grammar Schools, which title now includes what were for many years known as Secondary Schools, have altered relatively little in their methods and in their curricula, although their pupils have changed greatly. The question which Dr. Campbell raises is that of the solution offered by the new Comprehensive Schools, implying that here we shall find the solution. It is constantly objected that these schools will collapse under the weight of their own bureaucracy; that in education nothing can replace the personal touch.

A similar problem is recognised in the great factories; and the answer would seem to be in the development of working squads each with its own *esprit de corps* and an interest in good standards of execution, and I expect that such a solution has not been overlooked in the new schools. It must be admitted that to many of the rank and file of Grammar School teachers much that is claimed by the experts appears magic moonshine unconnected with practical experience, particularly experience of the modern child.

Dr. Campbell gives a well documented study of these schools from 1892 to the present. I give as my own opinion from long experience of this type of school that of the large influx of pupils brought in by the 1944 Act, not more than 25% are fitted for the methods and curricula in force. These must be radically revised; or else the bulk of the children should be catered for in some other type of school. The present conditions lead to a waste of public money, to the miseducation of the young, and the disillusionment of the teachers.

C.B.B.

never actually took possession of his Episcopal See. In 1520, Pope Leo X (1513-1521) nominated to the See of Greenland, Vincent Peter Kampe, confessor of King Christian II of Denmark, on the king's suggestion, who promised to send the Bishop in one of his ships, but the Bishop never reached his See, the headquarters of which were always at Gardar.

CORRESPONDENCE

HUNGARY

Anna Kethly, Hungarian Social Democrat, has been often in the news of late, many of her speeches receiving wide publicity.

However, certain speeches of hers, such as the one made at the Socialist International, in Vienna in early November, did not obtain such adequate coverage.

She stated that Cardinal Mindszenty had become the standard-bearer of White Guard (Fascist) elements. He had called for a restoration of Central European feudalism, with the restoration of land to the old landowners and the return of the property of the Catholic Church (the biggest landowners in Hungary). Anna Kethly stated that on 31/10/56 a delegation of Budapest students had visited the Cardinal and requested him to stop his subversive tactics. The Social Democrats had warned the peasants that compliance with the Cardinal's wishes would deprive them of their land. Miss Kethly, then, is obviously alive to the dangers of a transfer of control from the Kremlin hierarchy to the Vatican hierarchy. D. SHIPPER.

CHARING

It is evident there is no copy of my *Encyclopaedia of London* in your office, or you would not have suggested that Charing referred to a dear queen. The following is the pertinent passage in my article: "The derivation does not imply a dear queen. Canon Westlake found evidence of a smith kept by one Richard at Charing at the end of the 12th century. An MS. entitled *Liber de Antiquis* mentions the village of Charing in 1260, thirty years before the death of Queen Eleanor. It is probably derived from the Anglo-Saxon *char*, whereby wood turned to coal becomes charcoal. Some have suggested that a charwoman is one who takes the turn of another. At Charing Cross the Thames turns east. There is a Charing in Kent which is situated at a deviation in the course of the Pilgrims Way." WM. KENT.

[Our actual words were: "It is supposed, though not proven... —Ed.]

THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH

In his recent article, "The Established Church and the BBC," Mr. Ridley argues that the Established Church justifies the attitude of the BBC and says it is futile for Freethinkers to attack this intolerant policy.

It is important to remember, however, that the BBC chose this policy themselves, and at the time of its inception the corporation could have adopted a policy of "a fair field and no favour." Other media of information such as books, newspapers and periodicals have adopted this attitude, and we can maintain that the BBC can be brought to adopt it.

The BBC could gain considerably in moral prestige by adopting a more impartial attitude, and permitting true freedom of the air. We might even persuade the Corporation to adopt as their motto, "Man shall speak freely unto man." G. DICKINSON.

A MATRIMONIAL PITFALL?

Re "A Matrimonial Pitfall" (December 17th), the following extract from "A Spoor of Spooks" by Bergen Evans is interesting:

"One type of opposite that seems to attract is religious opposites. Even among Roman Catholics where such marriages are strongly opposed, almost half are now mixed. Those who are about to make such unions are usually warned by their spiritual guides that they are risking unhappiness and they are certainly risking a higher probability of divorce than if they married one of their own faith. Although religious differences have, no doubt, embittered many a marriage and certainly have exacerbated marriages already embittered for other reasons, they rank very low as a cause for divorce. The Rev. John L. Thomas of St. Louis University, in a study of 7,000 marriages, found religion listed as a cause of family discord in only 2.9% of the cases, one tenth as often as drink, and one eighth as often as adultery.

"The unhappiness resulting from religious mixed marriages seems to accrue, to a large extent, to the pastors themselves, for the chief religious consequence of them seems to be an increase in irreligion. The question was investigated by Prof. Murrey H. Leiffer, of the Garret Biblical Institute, who found, in a study of

743 'mixed' marriages, that the commonest adjustment was for one or both of the partners to stop taking an interest in church. Those sects that maintain special schools for the children of their adherents have noticed that a depressingly large proportion of the children of mixed marriages go to the public schools. 'It is abundantly clear' to Professor Leiffer 'that interfaith marriages have unfortunate results for organised religion.'" (Pages 119-120.)

He later gives some interesting information on the effect of religion on the prevention (or lack of prevention) of crime. In general this book, like his previous one, *The Natural History of Nonsense*, is useful to freethinkers.

Thank you very much for an interesting and stimulating magazine. I wish I'd met it years earlier. F. FAWCETT.

DOES COMMUNISM OUST RELIGION?

For years the Communists have been assuring us that the traditional non-political approach to religion is all wrong. Religion, they say, is merely a weapon and ally of capitalism; abolish the exploitation of the people by the capitalists and, in a socialist society, religion would disappear. With state-supported anti-religious propaganda, youth indoctrination clubs, etc., they had everything in their favour. The come-back of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland is a grim commentary on the value of the Communist methods. The facts seem to me to indicate that, in the long run, the only effective way of dealing with religion is the way in which ninety years of N.S.S. experience has demonstrated that it can be done — by ceaseless non-political Freethought propaganda. At least, our people do not go back to the Church!

Our tried methods may not be spectacular, they may be slow and, in terms of new members, small, but they are sure. J. GORDON.

SCHWEITZER

To Mr. Bennett's reply to my letter on the Schweitzer legend I have little to add. I am still of the opinion that Mr. Du Cann did a good job in pricking the Schweitzer bubble and I suspect if the "Mission Station" were the subject of an impartial medical inquiry, our believing brothers would have their eyes opened. The vagaries of the human mind — and the Christian mind in particular — make an extremely complex phenomenon. Compensating mechanisms and self-deception at a hardly conscious level provide excellent cover for the believing mind.

With reference to my comparison of Schweitzer with the meek and lowly Jesus, I was only concerned with the Christian conception of Jesus.

Personally, I never did — even as a child — admire this emasculated, pathetic creature Jesus, and the believing antics of the religious fill me with contempt. Mr. Bennett is evidently an extremely pacific freethinker.

I have, however, found by hard experience that Christians only respect a fighter. Wherever one finds Christianity in action; in the schools, services, hospitals, in all institutions, political and municipal; the freethinker has to hit out and aggressively insist on the recognition of his right to refuse the religious designation. ROBERT F. TURNEY.

AND STILL THEY COME

You can add these to your list of Christianity's many "jarring sects," being included in Zululand sects listed in *Overseas News*: "Only Church of Christ," "Glory Bantu Church," "Church of Pleasant Living Congregation," "Native Apostolic Church," and, last but we hope not least, "African Caster-Oil Dead Church" (as spelt).

THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN: Its Character, Methods and Aims. By Avro Manhattan.

Price 21/-; postage 1/-.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen.

Series 1, 2, 3, 4. Cloth bound.

Price 6/- each series; postage 6d. each.

PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT. By Chapman Cohen.

Price 3/- (specially reduced price); postage 4d.

FREEDOM'S FOE — THE VATICAN. By Adrian Pigott. A collection of Danger Signals for those who value liberty. 128 pages. Price 1/6; postage 4d.

SOCIAL CATHOLICISM (Papal Encyclicals and Catholic Action). By F. A. Ridley.

Price 1d.; postage 2d.

AGE OF REASON. Thomas Paine's masterpiece with 40-pages introduction by Chapman Cohen.

Cloth 4/-; Paper 2/6; postage 4d.

FACT AND FICTION. Secular Poems by C. E. Ratcliffe. Price 2/-; postage 4d. From the Pioneer Press, or 13 Madeira Road, Clevedon, Somerset. (Proceeds to FREETHINKER Sustentation Fund.)